

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20

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FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9430

UNCLAS BRUSSELS 7322

E.O. 11652 N/A

TAGS: ENTRG, BE

SUBJECT: PETROLEUM DEVELOPMENTS IN BELGIUM

REF: (A) BRUSSELS 7309; (B) BRUSSELS A-318

1. DURING QUESTION PERIOD FOLLOWING SHORT TALK TO AMERICAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE ON DECEMBER 17, BELGIAN MINISTER OF ECONOMIC AFFAIRS CLAES SPOKE OF BELGIUM'S PLANS FOR FURTHER ACTION TO DEAL WITH ENERGY CRISIS.

2. HE SAID THAT BELGIUM WOULD CONVERT AS MANY ELECTRIC GENERATING PLANTS AND CEMENT PLANTS AS POSSIBLE FROM FUEL OIL TO COAL AND THAT DOMESTIC COAL PRODUCTION FOR 1974 WOULD BE INCREASED FROM 8.4 MILLION TONS TO 9.0 MILLION TONS.

3. A PROGRAM OF PRESSURING PRIVATE CONSUMERS TO REDUCE ELECTRICITY, GAS AND FUEL OIL CONSUMPTION BY 20 PERCENT WOULD START SOON AND AN AGREEMENT WAS BEING NEGOTIATED WITH INDUSTRY REPRESENTATIVES CALLING FOR A 40 PERCENT REDUCTION IN INDUSTRIAL ENERGY CONSUMPTION.

4. IF PETROLEUM REMAINS IN SHORT SUPPLY FOR LONG, BELGIUM IN PREPARED TO BUY ON THE "FREE MARKET" IN ORDER TO KEEP ITS INDUSTRY

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SUPPLIED.

5. BELGIUM HAS NO RPT NO PLANS TO ALTER ITS POLICY TOWARD FOREIGN WORKERS. NO PLANS EXIST FOR LAYING THEM OFF FIRST NOR FOR SEEKING MORE FOR THE COAL MINES. FOR THREE OR FOUR MONTHS, THE MINISTER SAID, BELGIUM WILL SEE HOW MARKET FORCES SORT THINGS OUT AMONG THE WORKERS.

6. HE SAID IT WAS STRICT GOB POLICY TO KEEP ITS "STRATEGIC RESERVE" OF PETROLEUM UNTOUCHED. THIS RESERVE IS NOW AT ABOUT 120 DAYS WORTH OF GASOLINE, 104 DAYS WORTH OF DISTILLATES AND ABOUT 90 .DAYS WORTH OF FUEL OIL.

7. ACCORDING TO CLAES, EVEN IF THE ARAB-ISRAELI ISSUE IS SOON SETTLED, THE GOB INTENDS TO KEEP UP ITS PRESSURE ON THE CONSUMER TO USE LESS ENERGY. THE DAY OF CHEAP ENERGY IS OVER AND THE CITIZEN MUST BECOME FULLY CONSCIOUS OF THIS FACT. IF HE DOES NOT, EUROPE'S ABILITY TO COMPETE IN THE WORLD ECONOMY WILL ERODE RAPIDLY AND ITS STANDARD OF LIVING WILL DECLINE SERIOUSLY.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS WILL BE WEIGHED AT A LATER DATE, THE MINISTER REMARKED, BUT HE WAS SURE THE NEW STANDARDS WOULD BE LESS STRINGENT THAN ONE MIGHT WISH.
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